

Keepers of the Land

AmeriCorps



Vol. 1, No. 5

December 2001

AmeriCorps: Getting Things Done!

Mark Edwards
Program Director

AmeriCorps members within the DNR have accomplished a lot after only three-quarters of the yearlong grant. AmeriCorps, known as the "Peace Corps in the United States," assisted the DNR's Keepers of the Land Volunteer Program by enrolling 20 full-time, two part-time, and 20 summer members.

Ten full-time members working across the state in partnership with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) provided technical assistance to private landowners. They directly contacted over 3,700 people educating them on various state and federal programs related to filterstrips, terrace construction, waterways, the Farmable Wetlands Program, CRP, windbreaks, native grass seeding, food plots, the Wetland Reserve Program, Wildlife Incentive Program, Riparian Buffers and others. They conducted 1,290 field visits and/or wildlife plans affecting

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Halloween Event

Celebrating Halloween at Backbone State Park

Abbey Harkrader
AmeriCorps Regional Naturalist

The first of what hopes to be an annual event at Backbone State Park was a huge success! On October 27, the Halloween Hike took place. Due to budget problems within the Parks division, I tried to pull it off with mostly volunteers and donated materials. Backbone State Park is in a very rural region of the state, and I had many concerns about rounding up volunteers and getting people interested in the event. The one thing about this area in Northeast Iowa though, is there is little offered in the way of organized "Fun Houses." I thought a Halloween Hike similar to what some county conservation boards do in other parts of the state might give both kids and adults a fun alternative to celebrate the holiday.

The Halloween hike went very well and 140 participants attended. It was not designed to scare visitors, but to teach them about our natural world through fun skits stationed along the trail. Our theme this year was a mystery to figure out what creature was harassing the fisherman. Each skit would drop hints as to the identity of the prankster and it taught the audience a little about threatened and endangered species as well. A Grumpy Fisherman, an Indiana Bat, a Blue Spotted Salamander, a Chipmunk, and a Wise Old Barred Owl made up the cast. By the end the visitors were all asking what the creature was. A mount of an otter was displayed, while I discussed the history and comeback of the otter here in Iowa.

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23,500 acres and organized 19 landowner field days/workshops reaching 1,370 people. They networked and partnered with 89 various groups such as Pheasants Forever, County Conservation Boards, US Fish and Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Resource Conservation and Development, National Wild Turkey Federation and others.

The ten dedicated members donated additional volunteer time after performing their normal duties working on bird counts, prescribed prairie burns, duck and geese banding, duck box construction, swan releases, roadside surveys, Wetland Reserve Program monitoring, native grass seeding, and other projects. An admirable effort was given by each member to make Iowa a better place to live.

Two full-time, one part-time and eight summer members served statewide as naturalists in our state parks giving 510 programs to over 16,000 people. This was the first time in over 60 years an interpretation program has been offered in our state parks. Attendance figures proved that the public wanted and appreciated the members' service. The naturalists worked on additional projects such as developing slide shows, establishing interpretive trails, playground installation, and assisted schools, libraries, county day camps, 4-H, church camps and other community organizations.

Three full-time members were located at the DNR's Springbrook Education Center and provided environmental education programs reaching over 6,000 school children. In addition they conducted continuing education classes for teachers, established a recycling program and display, assisted other organizations off-site in providing hunter education, and assisted in prairie management.

Three full-time members were located in Des Moines at the Wallace building. Two members divided their time between IOWATER (volunteer water quality monitoring) and Keepers of the Land (volunteer program within the DNR). They helped train over 500 citizens in IOWATER's two-day classroom instruction

providing testing kits, macroinvertebrate identification and other educational materials. They helped support the new Keepers of the Land Volunteer Program by wrapping up Earth Year 2000, helped organize the first annual Volunteers in Natural Resources Conference, and contacted hundreds of people to volunteer on public lands. They also are responsible for this wonderful newsletter.

The other member in Des Moines focused on waste management through the Pro-Iowa program. She worked to establish an umbrella organization to partner with and educate businesses, city councils, and county governments about composting alternatives to reduce waste in public landfills.

Two full-time, one part-time, and twelve summer members formed the Ecosystem Management Crew. They functioned as a "hit" squad camping at various locations across the state and focused on projects needing immediate assistance related to trails, prairie management, and local Friends groups. They restored over 15 miles of highly damaged trails of which some were eroded to depths of five feet. They constructed a new trail/boardwalk at Eleanor Bedell State Park in northwest Iowa. This was a significant contribution considering that Bedell is our first new state park in almost 40 years. They worked closely with the Lake Macbride State Park "Friends of the Trail" group in eastern Iowa. The friends contributed over \$50,000 locally for materials to renovate the lake trail. The crew provided labor to resurface the trail, install drainage tile, and construct over 600 feet of block retaining walls to reduce erosion into the lake, which had significantly affected water quality. They cleared 18 acres of prairie in western Iowa and planted six acres to reduce mowing in north central Iowa.

All total, AmeriCorps members have directly contacted over 36,000 people and recruited over 1,500 volunteers to improve the quality of life in Iowa. All this in just nine

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Meet Your New Leaders

Tina Dunphy and Kelly Thompson join the ICVS

Erika McCroskey

Keepers of the Land AmeriCorps member

AmeriCorps members across Iowa are welcoming two new administrators to the program. Tina Dunphy, Program Officer and also coordinator of disability issues, and Kelly Thompson, Training Coordinator, have begun their new jobs with great excitement. Both are carrying out their duties under the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service, which oversees the AmeriCorps program.

Tina has relocated to Des Moines from her previous job in Muscatine. Her work there as Project Director of Great River AmeriCorps lends great experience to her new responsibilities. She replaces Jack Porter who is now with the Department of Cultural Affairs as an Architecture Historian.

There are many ideas and changes that Tina looks forward to implementing. Particularly, she wants increased communication between the Commission and the various AmeriCorps programs. On-site visits will be important to the success of this communication. Most of all, she wants to be responsive to what the directors and members need. Maximizing member development is a strong point for the AmeriCorps program as a whole. To accomplish this, ideas have emerged that would allow for regional trainings *just* for members. For directors, she would like to streamline reporting and try to lessen this paperwork, while still providing adequate information. This will give directors more opportunities to have increased one-on-one contact with their members.

In addition to her other duties, Tina is also coordinator of disability issues. She wants to ensure that the different programs have access to training about disability issues. Beyond that, she will focus on ways to recruit people with disabilities while being sensitive to these issues by

making sure procedures are in place to best benefit all potential members. Overall, she is very excited about the possibilities that await her, and those she works with, in her new job.

Kelly brings her experience as office manager for the Governor's office to her new job as training coordinator. Kelly will work with a few specific program projects, but overall her emphasis will be on providing training opportunities. She said she became interested in the job because it sounded both challenging and interesting. Because AmeriCorps is affiliated with so many organizations and agencies, she felt that this opportunity would be very exciting. Kelly has enjoyed years of volunteering with churches, local schools, Boosters, and other groups. She wants to help make this program in Iowa outstanding nationally!

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months. This is quite an accomplishment for a small group of people with big hearts. AmeriCorps has contributed significantly to the DNR, pursuing our mission statement of managing, protecting, conserving, and developing our natural resource so that the quality of life for Iowans is significantly enhanced by the use, enjoyment, and understanding of those resources.



TIRE CLEANUP

Erika McCroskey

Keepers of the Land AmeriCorps member

On November 20, DNR AmeriCorps members Kenny Bentson, Kathy Maline, Erika McCroskey, and Andrew Orłowski participated in a tire cleanup near Huxley in rural Story County. Linda Terry, DNR AmeriCorps Program Coordinator, also attended the event. Sponsored by Story County Conservation and the DNR, about 30 volunteers pulled discarded tires from the streambed of Walnut Creek. Mel Pins, an environmental specialist with the DNR, helped organize the event. Many employees of Story County Conservation also helped make this event a success.

Volunteers were able to see first-hand the importance of tire cleanup. The tires were part of a 10,000-tire stockpile, and a large number was removed that day. Judging by the sore muscles the next day, real work was accomplished! Once the tires are removed, they will be recycled and used in highly efficient tire-derived fuels, or in markets using shredded tires.

Members from the Trees Forever AmeriCorps program also contributed to the cleanup. It seems that no matter the job, members from different programs are willing to contribute to the efforts. AmeriCorps member Kathy Maline felt grateful to be a part of the cleanup. "This is what it is all about. It is so important to be supportive of efforts like this one. Volunteer days like this, getting your hands dirty, make it all worthwhile."

It was very hairy at about 2:00 that day because two characters canceled at the last minute. Rick, my husband, saved the day by offering to be the salamander, roping a buddy in for the fisherman, and getting his sister to lead his hike. Because I don't have a printer yet, I had to handwrite their new scripts and they only had a half-hour to learn their parts, but played them well. (Rick hates to be in the spotlight, so I owe him big). Once we got the "Show" underway, all went very smoothly and I think everyone involved had a fun time.

We received many great compliments, and the Friends of Backbone State Park Group was very impressed and encouraged for next year. Johnson County just started one this year as well, and had 200 attend from the Iowa City - Cedar Rapids area, so I am very pleased with the turnout in our rural area.

This was my biggest event of the year, but is a good example of what I do every day on a smaller scale. My AmeriCorps position is the Regional Naturalist for the eastern half of Iowa. I provide educational programs to the public, as well as develop interpretive themes for each individual park in my area to guide Naturalist programs in the future. I also work as a coordinator/mentor for the seasonal naturalists that are hired each year for the park units in my half of the state. My office is in the Civilian Conservation Corps Museum at Backbone State Park. This beautiful park is the oldest in the state and offers wonderful historic structures, trout streams, cabins, hardwood forests, and water recreation. If you have never been to Backbone, I highly recommend visiting some time or helping at our next Halloween Event.